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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 001425

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG - LAWRENCE, D - JOST AND DRL  
POSTS FOR NEA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/11/2016  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: TUNISIAN HUMAN RIGHTS LEAGUE QUAGMIRE CONTINUES

REF: A. TUNIS 1402  
[B](#). TUNIS 1390  
[C](#). TUNIS 1308  
[D](#). TUNIS 1255  
[E](#). TUNIS 501

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM HUDSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Recent discussions with individuals involved in the current Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) crisis (Ref C) indicate GOT repression of the group's activities is likely to continue indefinitely. Despite recent EU efforts to engage the GOT (Ref B), there is no sign the LTDH's difficulties are likely to be resolved in the near future. LTDH officials and independent observers fear that the GOT will only cease its aggressive efforts when the LTDH becomes defunct. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) During a June 8 meeting, LTDH President Mokhtar Trifi told Poloff that she was the first non-Executive Committee member to be permitted to enter the LTDH headquarters in nearly 6 weeks and that the Tunis headquarters is the only LTDH office that is currently open, as all others are blocked by police. (NOTE: Approximately 4-6 plain clothed security officials were standing along the road observing the LTDH entrance, but no one attempted to block access. END NOTE.) Despite a number of court appearances since September 2005 (Ref E), Trifi said no progress had been made on the legal dispute and that there is no resolution in sight. At one point, Trifi said an independent group of mediators had presented a proposed solution to the two parties. Trifi said the LTDH Executive Council accepted all of the proposals, but the pro-GOT entities never responded. Worse, said Trifi, editorials in local papers claimed the Executive Council was refusing a mediated solution. Trifi opined that the GOT only wants a human rights organization "that sends congratulation letters" commending Tunisia's human rights achievement.

[3](#). (C) Later on June 8, Ambassador discussed the LTDH crisis with Mohammed Charfi, a former minister and one of the mediators between the LTDH leadership and pro-GOT entities whose legal case against the leadership has been used to restrict LTDH activities. Charfi told the Ambassador that he also has no hopes that the LTDH will be able to overcome its current problems. Charfi said that, in his view, the GOT refuses to accept the existence of an independent human rights organization, preferring to keep the group in a legal limbo that prevents any LTDH activity.

[4](#). (C) At another civil society event on June 9, three members of the Bizerte branch of the LTDH told Poloff that

the harassment appeared to be coming from the highest level of the GOT. Dismissing the suggestion that recent changes within the Ministry of Interior (Ref A) could be positive, Bizerte branch President Ali Ben Salem suggested that President Ben Ali personally authorizes the harassment of civil society.

15. (C) Given the current impasse, Trifi, who met with Deputy Secretary Zoellick during his May 18-19 visit to Tunis (Ref

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D), asked that the USG continue its pressure on the GOT. He explained that President Ben Ali relies on the fact that the US -- and other Western governments -- will only engage periodically on human rights and democracy issues. The GOT must feel that its international relationships are at risk if any change is to result, said Trifi.

HUDSON